DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 946 CG 026 061

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TITLE Project Achieve Transition Services (PATS), 1993-94. OER Report.
INSTITUTION New York City Board of Education, Brooklyn, NY. Office of Educational Research.
PUB DATE 1 Aug 94
NOTE 29p.
AVAILABLE FROM Office of Educational Research, New York City Board of Education, 110 Livingston Street, Room 740, Brooklyn, NY 11201.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attendance; Attendance Patterns; *Dropout Prevention; High Risk Students; High Schools; *Improvement Programs; Instructional Improvement; Potential Dropouts; Program Evaluation; Student Adjustment; Student Attitudes; Student Characteristics; Student Needs; Transfer Students
IDENTIFIERS *Late Entry Students; New York City Board of Education

ABSTRACT

Project Achieve Transition Services (PATS) is a four-year high school attendance improvement, dropout prevention project which targets late-entry students consisting primarily of immigrants, transfers, and long-term absentees. The program uses a case management approach to provide support services, instructional enhancements, and family outreach to meet these students' needs. The evaluation takes the form of a case study of the program as it is being implemented in Martin Luther King, Jr. High School in Manhattan (New York), as well as assessment of quantitative outcomes in all seven participating schools. Attendance data for late-entry students was found to be only slightly lower than the attendance rates of the regular school population in all seven schools. Findings suggest that the program has an effect on long-term absentees who constitute an important segment of the late-entry population. Although credit accumulation data showed that few students met the program's objectives in this area, the number of credits earned by late-entry students in this program compare favorably to the overall credit accumulation of other non-participating students. The findings suggest that the program is having a positive impact on the majority of the students for whom it was established. (BF)

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ED 383 946

OER Report

Project Achieve Transition Services
(PATS)

1993-94

Office of Educational Research
BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
110 Livingston Street
Brooklyn, New York 11201

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Achieve Transition Services (PATS) is a four-year high school attendance improvement dropout prevention project of the Board of Education of the City of New York operated jointly with the United Way of New York. Now in its third year of operation, the program targets late-entry students (also known as over-the-counter students) consisting primarily of immigrants, transfers, and long-term absentees (L.T.A.s). The program, which is being implemented in seven schools, uses a case management approach to provide support services, instructional enhancements, and family outreach to meet these students' needs. The PATS team in each school consists of an ombudsperson (coordinator) administering the program, a full-time Board of Education paraprofessional, providing instructional support, and a full-time family worker from an appropriate community-based organization (C.B.O.) responsible for family outreach. The Division of High Schools requested that the Office of Educational Research (OER) conduct an evaluation of PATS. The OER evaluation for 1993-94 takes the form of a case study of the program as it is being implemented in Martin Luther King, Jr. High School in Manhattan, where PATS has been in place since the first year of funding (1991-92) as well as an assessment of quantitative outcomes in all seven schools.

This study is based on observations made by the evaluator during the course of an all-day site visit to the school and interviews the evaluator conducted with the PATS team--the ombudsman, the paraprofessional, and the family worker--as well as with related school personnel, several participating students, and family members of participating students. The University Applications Processing Center (U.A.P.C.) also provided quantitative data on student attendance and credit accumulation from all seven schools.

Attendance data for late-entry students was found to be only slightly lower than the attendance rates of the regular school population in all seven schools. Overall, the program appears to be having an impact on the attendance of students entering during the second marking period. This finding suggests that the program has an effect on long-term absentees who constitute an important segment of the late-entry population. Although credit accumulation data shows that few students met the program's objectives in this area, the number of credits earned by late-entry students in this program compares favorably to the overall credit accumulation of other non-participating students. The findings suggest that the program is having a positive impact on the majority of the students for whom it has been established.

The program's effectiveness derived from several factors: the experience, skills and dedication of the PATS staff, their ability to work as a team, and the support they receive from and give to administrators and related school personnel. An important and possibly unique additional factor is that the ombudsman runs the computer lab at the school and integrates his work there into the PATS program.

Based on these findings and observations, the following specific recommendation is offered:

- Enroll the best and most committed members of the teaching staff to play a more integral role in the PATS program, to steer PATS in the direction of academic excellence rather than remediation. It would also have the effect of "raising the consciousness" of teachers who may tend to be unaware or dismissive of PATS.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by the Office of Educational Research (OER) of the Board of Education of the City of New York under the direction of Dr. Lori Mei. Thanks to Dr. Phyllis Goldberg for collecting and interpreting the data, and preparing the final report.

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I. INTRODUCTION

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Project Achieve Transition Services (PATS) is a four-year high school attendance improvement dropout prevention project of the Board of Education of the City of New York operated jointly with the United Way of New York. Late-entry students (also known as over-the-counter students) comprise the targeted population. The group consists primarily of immigrants, transfers, and long-term absentees (L.T.A.s).

To meet the needs of these students, the program uses a case management approach to provide support services, instructional enhancements, and family outreach. Specific services include: registration intake, school and community orientation programs, testing and evaluation, counseling and other support for health, housing, and immigration, nontraditional and alternative academic programming; academic and career counseling, peer tutoring and mentoring programs, acculturation activities, and referrals to outside agencies.

In its third year of operation, the program linked seven high schools to community-based organizations (C.B.O.s). The schools included Erasmus Hall, Seward Park, William H. Taft, Eastern District, Adlai E. Stevenson, Park West and Martin Luther King, Jr. The C.B.O. chosen for each school was one judged appropriate for the targeted population, sensitive to the students' cultural background and current needs and able to communicate effectively with the students and their families.

The PATS team in each school consisted of an ombudsperson (coordinator, administering the program), a full-time Board of Education paraprofessional (providing instructional support), and a full-time family worker from the C.B.O. (responsible for family outreach). The ombudsperson/coordinator also worked to coordinate existing school resources through a schoolwide team on late-entry students. The role of the ombudsperson was to ensure a holistic approach, integrating services and acting as an advocate for students and their families. Ombudspersons also assumed responsibility for providing alternative instruction to PATS students who entered school after the first marking period.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The program established the following objectives, in accordance with those used by the funding agency to assess PATS' effectiveness:

- All participating students will demonstrate an attendance rate no lower than the overall attendance rate for students in the schools in which the project is located.
- For purposes of the program outcomes, the target population was divided into two categories--those entering in the first six weeks of the term or within the first marking period (identified as Group A), and those beginning school after the second marking period has started (identified as Group B). The objective for Group A was that at least 75 percent of the participating students will earn a minimum of 3 academic units; the objective for Group B was that 75 percent of the participating students will accumulate a minimum of 2 diploma units.
- Eighty percent of the participating parents will express satisfaction with the information and training received as a result of family outreach services.
- Ombudspersons, counselors, and educational assistants will indicate/display an increased knowledge of effective dropout prevention and educational enhancement strategies.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The Division of High Schools requested that the Office of Educational Research (OER) conduct an evaluation of the PATS program. With limited resources available for the evaluation, PATS staff agreed that the present evaluation would not survey the program in all seven schools but would take the form of a case study of the program as it is being implemented in a single school. Accordingly, Martin Luther King, Jr. High School in Manhattan, where PATS has been in place since the first year of funding, 1991-92, was selected.

The evaluator reviewed program materials and visited the school to observe program activities. In the course of the visit the evaluator conducted an extended interview with the PATS ombudsman, and also interviewed the paraprofessional, the family worker, related school personnel, and several participating students. The evaluator also interviewed several family members of participating students who happened to be at the school on the day of the evaluator's visit.

OER worked with the University Applications Processing Center (U.A.P.C.) to obtain quantitative data on student attendance and credit accumulation, according to the classifications of student groups participating in the program, from all seven schools.

SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

This report describes the Project Achieve Transition Services program at Martin Luther King, Jr. High School in the

third year of PATS' grant period. Chapter I describes the context of the program, the target population and how it is served, and the objectives and evaluation methodology used in this study. Chapter II focuses on the implementation of the program and how it is perceived by the three members of the PATS team, related school personnel, and students and their families. Chapter III summarizes the quantitative outcomes for students participating in the program at all seven PATS schools. Chapter IV contains OER's conclusions and recommendations.

Each of the seven schools where PATS is in place is unique. The students and families served are very heterogeneous, linguistically, socially, culturally, and otherwise, and the difficulties they encounter as they seek to become integrated into the school community are correspondingly diverse. The needs of a native New Yorker who is returning to the public school system after having been incarcerated for several years are very different, for example than the needs of a student whose family has just immigrated to the United States, who has never been permitted to go out in public unaccompanied by a male relative, and who speaks no English. In focusing on the implementation of PATS at Martin Luther King, Jr., therefore, the evaluation does not seek to portray it as typical or representative; rather, it seeks to show how PATS works in a particular set of circumstances to meet the needs of a particular student population.

II. IMPLEMENTATION AND RESPONSES

BACKGROUND

Of the 3,500 students who attend Martin Luther King, Jr. High School, PATS serves between 700 and 800 a year. Eighty percent of the PATS students at the school are new to the United States and speak English as a second language. The majority of these students are from the Dominican Republic and have Spanish as their mother tongue; others speak Vietnamese, Haitian Creole, Arabic, and Chinese.

The remaining over-the-counter students include those who have moved from out-of-state or from another borough; transfer students from other high schools in Manhattan; those who have been suspended; and students remanded from penal institutions who are re-entering the school system.

The ombudsman, an experienced teacher of English as a second language (E.S.L.) at the college level, has been teaching at Martin Luther King, Jr. for ten years (including a four-year stint as a senior grade advisor). He continues to run the school's computer lab, a corner of which functions as a second PATS office. He designs programs for individual students and teaches two classes on the computer: E.S.L. and English or Math Regents Competency Test (R.C.T.) prep. Many of the PATS students come to the lab at the end of the school day to work on the computer and, it seems, to spend time in the supportive environment that the ombudsman and the two other members of the PATS team have created.

The team's paraprofessional, who had been a special education paraprofessional at Martin Luther King for more than 12 years, has been a member of the PATS staff since the program was first implemented. The family assistant, who was a teacher of E.S.L. for 16 years, is employed by Alianza Dominicana. At the time of the evaluator's visit to the school, he had been with PATS for three months.

IMPLEMENTATION

The PATS team members are involved in every aspect of "their" students' lives--academic, social, cultural, economic--and they are attentive to seemingly small matters that can make an enormous difference in the students' school experience. Their work includes reaching out to parents and communicating with teachers.

The ombudsman views himself not only as a surrogate parent to the PATS students but as someone whose job is to give support to the entire family. "We're not just dealing with the academic aspect of the students' lives," he told the evaluator. "We handle any needs they have--a green card for the parent, housing, welfare."

"The intervention is different for students who come in later. They look at you like they wish they were dead, or they don't want to be here. You have to talk to them real: 'This is a chance to make a new start.' I help them draw up a plan to graduate. They've been pushed around so much it gives them control, options."

The ombudsman distributes a "logic map" that he designed to help new students find their way around the school. On their first day he tells them that if they can't find a room they should come back to him and he'll take them.

The family assistant emphasized the importance of doing "the little things to accommodate the students, so they feel welcome. I do a lot of translating. I help them fill out job applications for summer jobs."

PATS sponsors an annual awards assembly, at which the principal presents certificates of achievement, and a multicultural "jam" featuring music and dance, food, and guest speakers representing various nationalities and ethnic groups. The "jam" was initiated by the ombudsman in response to a "series of incidents" of tension and conflict that had taken place at the school.

PATS team members make themselves fully available to their students, and to the teachers and administrators who work with them. On the day that the evaluator was present, in addition to their scheduled activities, members of the team did a counseling session with a suspension student who is abused at home and rarely comes to class; intervened on behalf of a foreign student who continually gets into fights with other students and teachers over what were called "cultural misunderstandings"; and did another counseling session with a student who is failing Spanish (his first language), arranging for him to receive tutoring. PATS

provides "all kinds of tutoring" for students, the ombudsman said.

The ombudsman runs a counseling group for "upstate students"--young men who have been in prison--the ultimate purpose of which is to support them to stay in school. "The goals are to help them to acknowledge who they are, to set goals, and to see the patterns that keep them from reaching their goals--the self-defeating behaviors. I help them talk about relationships at home, about changing behavior. I give them the reality. They need to see where they are so they can get to where they want to be." He also organizes a broad range of activities for these students--from day trips to summer internships--"to change their experiences."

The ombudsman conducts workshops for these and other students that address such issues as positive alternatives to violence; solutions to racial and ethnic violence; substance abuse and violence; peer mediation and conflict resolution.

He has invited local politicians to come to the school, where he hopes they will be viewed as role models.

PERCEPTIONS

"I go way, way beyond my job description...that's the only way you can accomplish anything," the family assistant said. "I see more than 60 students a term. You don't work with a student for three months and just let it go. You have to follow up, make yourself available in case of a crisis. You have to be patient, dedicated. I want to make sure they're served, and properly

served. Many of my students see me as a person they can rely on. I keep close contact with parents, phone, make home visits, arrange conferences...You have to establish that kind of relationship. My role is way beyond what was on paper. It's a matter of commitment."

The PATS paraprofessional sees herself as a "support arm" for the ombudsman: "I deal with whatever's going on at the moment...I run interference. I know my way around the school because I've been around so long. I know how to get things done, to go around red tape, to 'bend the rules.' I also do tutoring on the computer one to one. I think we're doing a good thing. Every school should have a set-up to facilitate new kids. Just being in a new school, they feel challenged, threatened. We tell them we're here. We don't give them a hard time. We try to resolve whatever issues we can."

The ombudsman spoke highly of the PATS team: "I relate well to some students, other members of the team to other students. I'm very lucky to work with the two of them. They're both excellent, very committed."

He said that many members of the teaching staff do not necessarily think of PATS as a resource: "I have to constantly remind faculty. My experience is that they forget."

But administrators rely heavily on PATS. "I think I'm seen as a valuable asset to the school," the ombudsman said. "My relationship with the administration is good. The principal supports what I do. The department heads works very well with

me. The bilingual guidance counselor depends on me to take care of her kids. The guidance counselor depends on me for admissions. What's going to happen when PATS ends?"

He added, "I hope (the Board of Education) can somehow come up with a budget to continue." "If that doesn't happen, we're going to leave a lot of students up in the air. The dropout rate will go sky high, and with it crime and delinquency. I see it as a complete disaster. I think PATS is working--at least for the students I come in contact with. I just don't see my group of students surviving in the school system without this program. It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to survive."

The ombudsman's perception of how PATS is regarded in the school, and his concern that the program may be among the casualties of the new budget, was echoed by the administrators and guidance counselors who work most closely with the team.

"PATS is a godsend," one administrator said, explaining: "We're a large school. It seems like students who arrive after the term starts are at risk simply because they're starting after everyone else does. But usually the number of problems a student has seems to correlate with how late they enter. The services PATS provides help a lot. They have the normal guidance counselor, but they have extra support. Sometimes before their name shows up in the computer, they'll have a problem. Most of the PATS kids go into the computer lab one period a day. You want to program the students so there's a chance of success. The

ombudsman custom designs programs depending on what individual students need. The worst danger is taking someone in and giving him or her a full program without looking at what the student needs. Plus he's got this great support staff. They're very good at follow-up."

Another administrator agreed: "For us, the program is very useful. It's giving support to students who are especially at risk. The guidance counselor doesn't always have the chance to do the follow-up. The lab gives us flexible programming--such as a current course in computer work. If PATS goes, it will be a loss for us. It has worked out very well--the combination of the person who's doing it, the lab link and the support staff."

Another administrator said: "It's a wonderful program. It takes some of the burden off us in terms of new kids, who have so many problems. It feels like we have a support team--we have someone to take them right after they come in...(Before PATS) it was terrible. The kids had to struggle on their own. When that program dies, I don't know what the kids will do."

A guidance counselor said of the PATS team: "I couldn't function without them. The over-the-counter students are mostly my kids. PATS helps me in an incredible way. After the initial evaluation, they embrace these students. We work very closely with them. The family assistant is very good.

"The computer programming helps me immensely," this guidance counselor continued. "We've had cases of housing and medical needs. They've helped me. It's wonderful. They see needs and

they help. With the load I have I couldn't work without them. I'm very grateful. Please keep it here! I think it's working very well."

A father who had come to the school to pick his daughter up said (in Spanish): "My daughter was very shy when she started. She could not speak English. And we could not help her--we were strangers, newcomers, ourselves. These people made her feel welcome. They made us feel welcome. Now my daughter has friends; she's learning. Of course, we're very proud of her."

A graduating senior said: "When I came here I didn't expect to graduate. The teachers told me in the other school I went to that I had a learning disability--that made me angry, so I never went. But these people--the PATS people--they're all right. They talk to you, they show you what you have to do."

III. QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES

ATTENDANCE DATA

One of the program objectives was that participating students would demonstrate an attendance rate no lower than the overall attendance rate for students in the schools in which the project was located.

Table 1 shows attendance data for both groups participating in the project, as compared to all other students in the school during the fall 1993 term. Table 2 shows similar data for the spring 1994 term. As indicated in these tables, the attendance rates of late-entry students are only slightly lower than the attendance rates of the regular school population. In general, in Fall 1993, those who entered within the first marking period (Group A) fared better than those who entered after the first marking period (Group B), while this pattern was reversed in the spring term. Moreover, attendance rates for Group B exceeded the attendance rate for regular school populations in four out of seven schools in the spring.

Overall, the program is having an impact on attendance, and is particularly successful with those entering during the second marking period. This finding suggests that the program has an effect on long-term absentees who constitute an important segment of this late-entry population. The finding may also be explained by the fact that this group is significantly smaller in number than those who enter during the first marking period (approximately 700 students, as compared to over 6,500). This may

Table 1

Attendance Rate in Fall 1993 of Student Groups by High School

School	Group A[a]	Group B[b]	Group C[c]
Adlai Stevenson	82.4	72.1	80.2
Eastern District	76.1	67.6	77.4
Erasmus Hall	84.8	66.5	78.0
Martin Luther King, Jr.	86.2	75.6	82.7
Park West	80.0	65.6	79.9
Seward Park	84.3	73.4	87.3
William Taft	74.5	79.4	64.0
Total	81.2	71.8	77.5

[a]Students entering during the first marking period.

[b]Students entering after the first marking period.

[c]All other students.

- The attendance rates of late-entry students were close to the attendance rates of the regular school population.
- In five of the seven schools, the attendance rates of Group A exceeded the attendance rates of the regular school population.

Table 2

Attendance Rate in Spring 1994 of Student Groups by High School

School	Group A[a]	Group B[b]	Group C[c]
Adlai Stevenson	65.8	72.6	74.4
Eastern District	73.9	78.6	78.4
Erasmus Hall	81.8	59.2	84.6
Martin Luther King, Jr.	78.4	82.7	84.6
Park West	68.7	73.1	72.2
Seward Park	83.2	90.9	86.7
William Taft	68.9	80.2	69.2
Total	71.6	79.7	78.0

[a]Students entering during the first marking period.

[b]Students entering after the first marking period.

[c]All other students.

- The attendance rates of late-entry students were close to the attendance rates of the regular school population.
- In Seward Park High School, the attendance rate of Group B exceeded the rate of all regular students by over four points while the attendance of Group B students at Park West exceeded the rate of all regular students by about one point.

suggest that smaller numbers of students are less likely to be overlooked and can derive a greater benefit from the program.

CREDIT ACCUMULATION

Students in most high schools can usually earn a maximum of five academic units or credits per semester and ten credits in a full academic year. OER evaluations have shown that students in regular high schools typically earn between eight and nine credits per year, or an average of 4.5 credits per semester. Program planners determined that the objective for Group A was that 75 percent of the participants would earn a minimum of three academic credits a term, while the objective for Group B was that 75 percent of the participants would earn at least two academic credits a term. The outcomes for these objectives for both fall 1993 and spring 1994 are shown in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Table 3 shows that none of the Group A students from participating schools met the program objective in either term. Table 4 indicates similar results: only in Seward Park did the program population succeed in meeting the evaluation objective--and only in the spring 1994 term.

However, the average credit accumulation for Group A students in the fall was about 60 percent, while the average fall credit accumulation for Group B students was over 40 percent. The difference in credit accumulation may be attributable to the relatively larger number of long-term absentees in the Group B populations, in which long-standing psycho-social problems and academic difficulties, rather than factors of English-language

Table 3

Credit Accumulation Percentages for PATS
Student Group A*

School	Fall 1993 N	Fall 1993 %	Spring 1994 N	Spring 1994 %
Adlai Stevenson	1,254	51.8	147	19.7
Eastern District	518	62.7	30	42.1
Erasmus Hall	604	66.2	18	50.0
Martin Luther King, Jr.	1,060	71.0	55	58.2
Park West	608	62.5	165	45.5
Seward Park	912	61.0	100	60.0
William Taft	1,322	50.7	165	37.0
Total	6,278	59.5	680	41.5

*Students entering during the first marking period.

- No school achieved the evaluation objective that 75 percent of the Group A students accumulate at least three credits in either the Fall or Spring terms.

Table 4

Credit Accumulation Percentages for PATS
Student Group B*

School	Fall 1993 N	Fall 1993 %	Spring 1994 N	Spring 1994 %
Adlai Stevenson	74	37.8	49	42.9
Eastern District	38	42.1	28	53.6
Erasmus Hall	37	35.1	11	9.1
Martin Luther King, Jr.	35	72.5	20	40.0
Park West	129	45.0	21	61.9
Seward Park	42	50.0	57	77.2
William Taft	131	45.0	61	55.7
Total	486	44.4	247	55.1

*Students entering after the first marking period.

- In spring 1994, only Seward Park achieved the stated objective that 75 percent of the students in Group B accumulate at least two credits.

acquisition, play a role in academic performance. Nonetheless, both figures compare favorably to the overall credit accumulation for other students of approximately 62 percent as well as to findings from previous years. They suggest that the program is having a positive academic impact on a majority of the students for whom it has been established, and that academic achievement is serving to motivate students to continue in school.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The PATS program, as it is being implemented at Martin Luther, Jr. High School, appears to be a model of its kind. The three team members, all highly experienced, skilled, and dedicated "above and beyond the call of duty," are well suited to the challenges of integrating PATS students into the academic and social life of the school. The ability of the PATS staff to work as a team clearly enhances their effectiveness. The team members function as advocates for the students and their families while working closely with administrators and guidance staff, who view them as allies in confronting what might otherwise be the overwhelming problems these students bring to the school setting.

Understandably, these problems--and the pressing need to find immediate solutions to them--tend to determine how the PATS students are related to by the staff and other school personnel. One consequence of this "problem-solution" approach, which informs the PATS project as a whole, is that there is a tendency to have few expectations of these students and, consequently, to make few demands on them. The unspoken assumption seems to be that, at best, they will learn to "get with the program"--to attend school often enough and stay long enough to accumulate the necessary credits to graduate. It is a perspective that emphasizes maintenance rather than growth, or development.

Given that perspective, the perceptions of the PATS staff, corroborated by other school personnel, parents and students, and

by the observations of the evaluator, indicate that the program is meeting the maintenance needs of the students it serves.

Based on these findings and observations, the following specific recommendation is offered:

- Enroll the best and most committed members of the teaching staff to play a more integral role in the PATS program, to steer PATS in the direction of academic excellence rather than remediation. It would also have the effect of "raising the consciousness" of teachers who may tend to be unaware or dismissive of PATS.